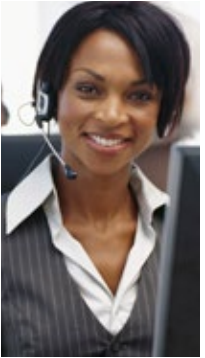




BalanceHealthSM Newsletter

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Your Family Health History

In 2004, the Surgeon General declared Thanksgiving to be National Family History Day. Family history is important as certain common diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes as well as some rare diseases like hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia can run in families and can have a genetic component. Furthermore, if one generation of a family has high blood pressure, it is not unusual for the next generation to have similarly high blood pressure.

Tracing the illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help your doctor predict the disorders that you may be at risk for. This knowledge can also help you to take preventative actions to keep yourself healthy.

Research shows that Americans are aware that family history can be important to overall health. In fact, a recent survey found that 96% of Americans believe that knowing their family history is important. Yet, the same survey found that only one-third of Americans have ever tried to actually gather and write down their family's health history.

What Can You Do

If you are lucky enough to get together

with your blood relatives this Thanksgiving, take advantage of National Family History Day to talk about and write down, any health problems that run in your family. It is most helpful to get a health history on your parents, grandparents, and siblings. For example, if you find out that your grandfather had a heart attack in his fifties and both he and your mother have high cholesterol, there is a chance you may be prone to this as well. In response, you can be extra careful to limit the saturated fat in your diet and be sure to fit in plenty of exercise in order to mitigate this potential risk.

A Helpful Tool

The Surgeon General has created a new computerized tool to help make it fun and easy for anyone to create a sophisticated portrait of their family's health.

The revised version of the "My Family Health Portrait" tool is a Web-enabled program that runs on any computer that is connected to the internet and running an up-to-date version of any major browser.

The Web-based tool helps users organize family history information and then print it out for presentation to

For more information or advice about your family health history, contact your Wellness Coordinator by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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their family doctor. In addition, the tool helps users save their family history information to their own computer and even share family history information with other family members. [Access the My Family Health Portrait Web tool here.](#)

Staying Healthy

It is important to remember that family history is just one piece of the health puzzle. A healthy lifestyle is just as important, if not more so, in preventing potential health concerns. If you do not have access to your biological family's health history, you can still mitigate any risks by continually practicing healthy habits. Similarly, if there are no red flags in your family history such as certain cancers or high blood pressure, it does not mean that you are immune to developing these conditions, so you should still be diligent about your overall health.

Here are some tips that you can incorporate into your everyday life to help you maintain health and ward off illness regardless of your family history.

Add Fish To Your Diet – The American Heart Association recommends a serving of fish two times per week. Fish is a good source of protein, is relatively low in saturated fat, and it has omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease. Stick to fatty fish such as salmon, albacore tuna, mackerel, lake trout, herring, and sardines. Additional sources of Omegas include tofu, soybeans, canola oil, walnuts and flaxseed.

Get Enough Sleep – Sleep is vital to good health and to mental and emotional well-being. The National Sleep Foundation found that people who do not get enough quality sleep are more likely to use health care services. Plus, sleep deprivation can negatively affect memory, learning and logical reasoning.

Exercise – According to the National Cancer Institute, exercising helps control weight, maintains healthy bones, muscles and joints, reduces risk of developing high blood pressure and diabetes, promotes psychological well-being, reduces risk of death from heart disease and reduces risk of premature death.

Floss Every Day – This may help keep your arteries healthy. A 2008 New York University study showed that daily flossing reduced the amount of gum-disease-causing bacteria in the mouth. This bacteria is thought to enter the bloodstream and trigger inflammation in the arteries, a major risk factor for heart disease.

Get your Fruits & Veggies – The ADA recommends five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day as part of a healthy diet. These plant foods can do many things to boost good health, including reducing the risk of some cancers, beating the signs of aging, improving memory, promoting heart health and enhancing the immune system.

Drink Tea – There is some evidence that tea may help in improving memory, and in preventing cavities, cancer and heart disease.

Remember that your Wellness Coach is available to help you create a healthy living plan that works for you!

Source: 2015 National Health Observances, National Health Information Center, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC.

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